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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on burnout in the helping professions and outlines steps that can be taken during counselor training to eliminate or reduce burnout. A discussion of the way in which the internal system of the counselor trainee can provoke burnout concentrates on issues of needs, expectations, and professional philosophy. Three burnout predisposing professional assumptions often held by counselor trainees that must be recognized and evaluated are described, i.e.,: (1) the assumption of personal responsibility for change within a counseling relationship; (2) the judgment of one's own competency for client success or failure; and (3) the assessment of one's self as a totally accountable change agent. Strategies which counselor educators can teach to help trainees recognize how they contribute to their own burnout, assess their burnout vulnerability, and learn techniques to assist themselves in avoiding burnout are discussed. Techniques such as forming prognoses along with diagnosing client problems, varying the client load, and keeping current through the professional literature and continuing education are included. (NRB)

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PREVENTING BURNOUT THROUGH COUNSELOR TRAINING

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Many articles have been written recently concerning the issue of burnout in the helping professions (Boy and Pine, 1980; Pines and Kafry, 1978; Maslach, 1978; Warnath and Shelton, 1976). Most seem to focus on how to avoid such an end product when a professional finds that the job results in demoralization, frustration and reduced efficiency. The focus of this article is how, during the training of counselors, steps can be taken to eliminate or reduce the end product of burnout. Why wait until one is a professional and plan for the elimination of burnout? The authors believe it can be done during training.

> "The professional role envisioned and internalized during counselor preparation seems inoperable in the real world and many counselors have become personally and professionally discouraged. These external pressures not only create demands and pressures but place a heavy burden on the counselor's time and energy. It also creates a psychological burden which negatively affects the counselor's professional functioning. Thus the counselor is really confused regarding role, mission and identity. (Boy and Pine, 1980, p. 161)

This article will address how the internal system of the counselor-in-training can provoke burnout, focussing on issues of needs, expectations, and professional philosophy.

If one is unclear about the role played in a helping situation, this can produce confusion, frustration and eventually burnout. Once causes are defined, then practical techniques can be learned during one's training program with the aim being that one can be trained on how to avoid burnout.

The need system of the counselor in training is a potential source of burn-

out. This is especially true when the nurture needs of the counselor in training are satisfied mainly through the client load. Some of the needs that can foster burnout are: a) maternal and paternal, b) power, and c) responsibility. These needs may effect the counselor in training in both a conscious and unconscious way. The maternal and paternal needs seem obvious. If the counselor sees the client as a child who needs to be nourished, protected and taken care of, then the counselor is setting a path that will truly lead to frustration, anxiety, anger and bitterness. Not too many clients are warm, loving, and grateful children!

Also if the counselor is seeking to fulfill power needs primarily through the clients, it seems the counselor is headed toward burnout. What is meant here is the desire to be important, have control of others and taking delight in being able to manipulate others. If a counselor has a grandiose, an exaggerated view of the power or influence that the counselor wields in the life of a client, the counselor is headed toward bitterness. Two principles of physics seem to have an application here which can tend to temper this "out of focus" view of the power exerted over another. A body at rest tends to remain at rest; and a body in motion tends to remain in motion. A client that is stuck tends to remain stuck and a client that tends to grow tends to remain in a growth mode.

Another need that seems to hasten burnout is the responsibility need. "I need to be responsible for my clients' growth, behavior, movement, lack of movement, etc. The client really doesn't have to do much, because the more the client doesn't do, the more the counselor assuems the work load.

It's important to note that all these needs are in relative terms.

All counselors have these needs to some degree, but as the need becomes more consuming, the more likely the needs tend to foster the burnout process.

Another dynamic that can be a factor in promoting the burnout of a mental health professional is being unclear about one's own personal philosophy of human nature. Should a counselor be unclear about what philosophically makes "humans tick", the counselor will, as a result, be unclear about the role he/she plays in the counseling process. The more unclear or ambiguous the counselor is about the professional role in a given situation, the more unclear is the outcome; hence, the counselor becomes more frustrated and unfulfilled, paving the path to become another burnout casualty.

Unrealistic professional expectations of self often contribute to the phenomena of counselor burnout. Many counselors-in-training view helping or facilitating human behavior change in an unrealistic, perhaps highly idealistic light; thus it is not uncommon to see how these student counselors set themselves up to become burnout casualties.

In defining one's self as a helper, especially a counselor whose career committment is to facilitate growth and change in people who are functioning less than optimally, certain burn-out predisposing professional assumptions or expectations arise that often go unchallenged. Unless counselor educators recognize and encourage honest evaluation of these assumptons, burn-out is a predictable eventuality.

Such unspoken expectations of professional dedication include a) the assumption of personal responsibility for change within a counseling relationship; b) judging one's own competency for client success or client lack of success; and c) holding one's self totally and completely accountable as a

change agent. These specific expectations are often interrelated, but combine to create such a (self induced and thus avoidable) stressor that occupational disillusionment is certain, without a reassessment of some basic counseling precepts.

When each of the occupational expectations (mentioned above) are evaluated at face value, the specific absurdity/irrationality is so obvious as to be ludicrous. However, the simplicity of such assumptions pervade all of the service professions and are so insidious in terms of philosophy that it becomes of primary importance that these issues be addressed, not once, but many times during training.

Many counselors-in-training hold themselves as responsible for change within the counseling relationship. It is believed by these counselors-to-be that helping the client to function more optimally is their sole professional "mission". In the face of it, this goal appears mildly reasonable. However, what happens when this "mission" fails? When the client does not begin to function more appropriately? Or indeed, begins to behave in less appropriate ways? Time and time again, student counselors have assumed a majority of the responsibility for this personally acknowledged failure. As a result, they develop a tendency to assume the blame for this failure. Many counselor educators, perhaps not recognizing this internal expectation, may unwittingly reinforce the student counselor's expectation by focusing on how intervention strategies and techniques might have been varied to achieve a different outcome. Or counselor educators may subscribe to the belief that with "more experience" the fledgling counselor, who does believe in this expectation, will be able to put a different perspective on the "failure". Neither of these

approaches deals with the underlying issue of counselor-client responsibility.

The second assumption is also the result of the expectation previously discussed. Whether a client is successful or unsuccessful in achieving change as a result of counseling, the counselor's professional self-esteem is personally judged competent or incompetent respectively. If a counselor evaluates his/her counseling to be successful, no threat to the student's professional self-esteem need arise. If, however, the counselor in training has more than the "expected" number of failures, the threat to professional self-esteem may become more dangerous. Should the tendency to hold one's professional self-esteem rest entirely on this personal judgement without reasonable assessment of extenuating circumstances occupational disillusionment or burn-out may result. These authors are not suggesting that incompetent counselors remain within the profession, but rather suggest that competency be evaluated by more of a gestalt approach rather than on a success/failure ratio.

The third expectation, of holding one's self as solely accountable as change agent, is another belief new counselors often hold, and which if unchecked may set the scene for eventual burn-out. This expectation involves the issue of personal investment vs. personal involvement within the counseling relationship. If one has a personal investment in someone or something, a return is expected. For example, should a client opt to chose a path about which the new counselor is less than enthusiastic, the counselor may 'feel' let down or betrayed. This is an investment and has a personal pay off for the counselor. If the counselor philosophically recognizes the inherent right of the client to choose his/her own course of life, while the counselor may feel a twinge of disappointment, the involvement has been facilitative.

Another influencing factor that can facilitate the burnout of a counselor is the personal philosophy of the counselor with reference to counseling theory. How does the counselor believe change is brought about? What is the role of the counselor in the therapeutic relationship? Ultimately this question revolves around the issue of the nature of humankind. Can people bring about change within themselves? Do people have freedom of choice? Are people prone to good or evil? When a counselor answers these questions, then the counselor comes in contact with the responsibility in the therapeutic change situation. The counselor whose philosophy of humans is that people need to be led or coerced into change, or be dependent in the counseling relationship will have a greater propensity for burn-out than the counselor whose philosophy of humans says that individuals have the responsibility for their behavior, have an inner drive for growth, and need only the environment staged to produce growth. As a counselor-in-training is made aware of his/her philosophy of counseling, then the choice can be made on what techniques might be employed to avoid burnout or what changes can be made in the philosophy which can reduce the risk of burnout.

A counselor whose philosophy purports responsibility for change needs to be aware of the burden of responsibility and develop techniques to cope with it. Also, the counselor could re-examine the philosophy of humans, be sure it is congruent with professed style of counseling, and choose possible areas of change in philosophy, hence change in style.

In implementing strategies to teach counselor trainees to cope with their own "burnout" process, the authors point out these potential pitfalls in general class lecture/discussion and in individual practicum supervision.

In supervision, the student is advised of what "burnout" tendencies are observed and intervention can occur to prevent the eventual casualty before the individual is graduated and subsequently employed.

The counselors-in-training are instructed to note the morale of the staff at their practicum placements, to recognize the demands of the job, to observe the operational set up and assess the "burnout" potential of the site. It is hoped that student counselors will be able to identify potential stressors that contribute to "burnout" and thus be better prepared to cope with their own self esteem and professional protection.

The personal demands that counselors-in-training make upon themselves for excellence, for being able to correct the ills of all people, for wanting client appreciation, and approval and for the tendencies already discussed, can also be dealt with during training. A good dose of reality through supervisor sharing incidents of failure, and/or mistakes and through conjoint identification of professional philosophy behavior flaws observed in student tapes and/or experiences, could provide the counselor trainee with the added realism to combat the idealistic tendencies of counselor performance.

Another way of preventing "burnout" involves keeping current through professional literature and continuing education. This is emphasized because individuals can come into contact with fresh ideas and even develop support systems for themselves. To remain challenged and optimistic in outlook is counter-productive to the "burnout process."

Another point that the counselors might consider is the type of client that is attracted to them. Does a counselor find by checking the client load that the case load is heavily weighted with depressed clients? If so, the

counselor can ask several questions: Why do I attract such clients? Do I find that such clients are a burden on me? Do I find myself after therapy feeling depressed myself?

If the answer is the depressed clients are attracted to me and causing negative reactions--what means am I using to diffuse negative feelings in me? The counselor needs to vary the client load and not have several depressed clients successively. By varying the case load the counselor may find that he/she does not become weighed down and hence take another step toward burnout.

It is also suggested that counselor-in-training begin with forming prognoses along with diagnoses of client problems. If counselors have prognosed that the chances for client change is poor, yet six to ten weeks later if the client has failed to make any noticeable change, and hold themselves accountable for this lack of change, then the prognosis initially formulated may help them to reevaluate their own accountability. The same strategy works in reverse as well, i.e. if the prognosis is good and the client has made no change, the counselor may then be motivated to reevaluate intervention techniques and strategies.

Another suggestion is to vary the client load, i.e. to avoid piling up on the same type of client within the working day, e.g. not to schedule five or six depressives in a row. It is recognized that some counselors are working in an environment where this technique will be almost impossible to fulfill, e.g. alcoholic centers or juvenile probation, but even within these settings, a variety of clientile problems can be arranged.

The authors believe that training and preparing counseling students for what realities can be expected on the job, will arm them with the weapons

necessary to prevent their own professional "burnout." The old adage holds true: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

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